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Castro Takes His Case to U.S. Public

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HAVANA—His tone was at times forceful, at times subdued. The language was eloquent, frequently impassioned. Fidel Castro had been challenged by the White House. For weeks he had heard his denials of Cuban involvement in the Shaba invasion contradicted by U.S. officials.

Now he was taking his case straight to the American people.

First to two congressmen and then to American reporters, Castro sought to counter charge for charge the assertions that his troops in Angola had aided the Katangan rebels who invaded Zaire.

"Brutal," Castro said of the American charges.

For 2½ hours, in a late-night interview Monday in his spacious office at Havana's Palace of the Revolution, Castro made his case. He sat and he paced. He puffed his cigar, and the words tumbled forth.

"We may be private about some things," he said. "We may be discreet. But we never have lied. We never made use of lies as an instrument of politics."

It was not the Cubans who were lying, Castro declared, but rather it is President Carter, who has been "confused and deceived" by his advisers.

American-Cuban relations have had many stormy moments, but the recent trend had been toward better times. Now, Castro said, he had been personally hurt and insulted at precisely the moment when the United States seemed prepared to make "just and constructive" moves toward Cuba.

Castro said he had asked himself many times in recent weeks, "How am I going to tell a lie to [Secretary of State Cyrus] Vance when he has had a constructive, respectful attitude to the problems between Cuba and the United States?"

"How would I lie to [U.N. Ambassa-

dor] Andrew Young, who has been respectful and kind to us? How would I lie to [Sen.] George McGovern, who has been interested in improvement of relations with Cuba?"

"But in addition," Castro asked, "how would I lie to Mr. Carter?"

The answer Castro said he was that he had not.

"Everything will be known sooner or later," he went on. "History will prove some day that we were telling the truth and that the charges against us were really false."

While the course of U.S.-Soviet relations has led Moscow to personally attack Carter, Castro stopped well short of that. He described the administration's "so-called hard policy, the policy of threats, the policy of pressure" as a "serious, tremendous mistake."

That policy, Castro said, "already has a name and a last name. It is [national security advisor Zbigniew] Brzezinski's policy."

The lie told against Cuba, he said, "is not a half lie. It is an absolute, total complete lie. It is not a small lie, it's a big lie. It is not a negligible lie, it is an important lie."

The lie, which he said was "manufactured in Brzezinski's office" was intended to "provide a pretext of justifying the U.S. intervention and the intervention of the NATO powers" on behalf of the government of Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko. It was, he said, "to manipulate U.S. public opinion and to pressure the U.S. Congress" to "lift restrictions established on subversive activities by the CIA."

The bulk of Castro case was to present in detail a series of events which he described as "inexplicable" occurring in the week following the May 11-12 raid on Zaire by Angola based Katangan rebels.

Within three days after the raid, he said, the U.S. government sent him a private message, through the Cuban interests section in Washington, and twice said publicly it had no proof of Zairian charges of Cuban involvement.

Because of that positive U.S. gesture, Castro said, he was "inspired to make a reciprocal gesture . . . to do something I have never done before."

Castro invited U.S. interests section chief Lyle Lane to a private meeting in which he said, he made six points.

Castro said he told Lane, "there were no Cubans—not one Cuban soldier—involved in Shaba; that we

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have no direct or indirect participation in the Shaba problem; that we have not trained the Katangans; that we have not supplied weapons; that we tried not to have any contact with the Katangans; and that we were opposed to that kind of operation."

"I had this meeting with Mr. Lane," Castro said, "as a gesture that I wanted to make toward the U.S. government."

Castro said he told Lane that he had heard "rumors" last month of a planned Katangan invasion—"rumors, not accurate or precise information since we have no intelligence operations among them, so it was only rumors."

"Later," he said, "I went through my papers and found that it had been in February." Motioning to an aide who handed him a large file, he said, "I have everything here complete on Cuba's position. I would say that in this case, this Shaba case, I have everything."

"We were concerned about [a possible invasion] because we knew this could become an instrument of provocation against Angola, a pretext for intervention afterwards as has happened once before. This time, it would be worse."

"It was then that we sent a message to [Angolan President] Agostinho Neto. We explained all the difficulties the new action of the Katangans implied. It was important to prevent that action from occurring, at any expense."

Neto, Castro said, "was fully in agreement with us, and we even knew he instructed his people to speak to the Katangans to adopt the measures necessary to prevent an invasion from taking place again."

A combination of factors led to the inability to stop the raid, Castro said. The large and little-patrolled areas in northeast Angola where the Katangues live, a reluctance on Neto's part to deal with the matter in a military rather than a diplomatic way, and an illness that kept the Angolan president out of the country.

"The fact is that the Katangans, acting on their own, went ahead with their invasion once again."

Carter administration sources have said that Castro's protests that Cuba and Angola tried to stop the raid were weak and unbelievable.

Castro said, however, that from a Cuban point of view the raid was one of the worst things that could have happened to harm the cause in Africa closest to Cuba's heart—what he termed the struggle against racism in southern Africa.

The timing of the raid was particularly bad,

Castro said, because the Zaire invasion drew world attention away from a recent South African attack on a Namibian guerrilla camp in southern Angola in which hundreds were reported killed.

"When I talked to Lane," Castro said, "I explained what had happened. I did not speak on behalf of the Angolans, but I knew the Angolans agreed with us. I told him I could not speak on behalf of the Soviets, but the Soviets fully agreed with our point of view."

It was impossible, Castro said, to have explained all positions more clearly. "I'll tell you again," Castro said, "that the United States government sent a message expressing its satisfaction with the contents of my talk with Mr. Lane."

The meeting with Lane, Castro said, was on a "confidential, top-secret" basis. "It was not a matter of having my picture taken or publishing it," he said.

Yet, Castro said, again on the same day he received the U.S. message and the public U.S. charges, the facts that the meeting had taken place, and part of its contents, were leaked in the United States to the press.

"It was a matter of minutes," Castro said. "All of these things happened in minutes."